

Natural Capital Germany – TEEB DE case study

Lahn Valley-Tourism:

Nature conservation and regional economy - sustainable and successful

The Lahn is a 242 kilometer long river which extends over six counties and three states. In order to conserve the river's beauty and uniqueness, the majority of the floodplain landscape is subject to special protection requirements. Nevertheless, this beauty is endangered due to fast growing tourism, especially because of water based tourism. The executive secretary of the "Lahn Valley Tourism Association" came up with a new plan after recognizing that the highly diverse nature of the river was the capital of the region. This broad regional development plan views the protection of that capital as a cross-cutting issue. The success tells its own tale.

Location:

Wetzlar

Actors:

Science, Citizens, Associations, Federal stat

Project description:

The Lahn Valley is one of Germany's nicest riverine landscapes, which especially attracts nature based tourism. Both hikers and bikers value the excellent infrastructure and the certificated hiking trails, for example the 290 kilometer Lahn Valley Hiking Trail which reopened in September of 2012. In addition, tourists are fascinated by the multiple canoeing opportunities. In 2011 there were 2.5 million registered overnight stays which led to 1.16 Billion Euro in revenue for the touristic sector, which provides jobs for 10,000 people. Meanwhile 50 local councils are part of the tourism association.

The natural riverbanks of the Lahn and its floodplain landscape serve as the habitat for many endangered animals and plant species. Besides numerous dragonflies, , kingfishers also call it home.

In 1993 the landscape protection regulation "Auenverbund Lahn-Dill" was enforced, in which the today's head of the "Lahn Valley Tourism Association" Achim Girsig could integrate his steering concept for water based tourism. Back then, all stakeholders were already worried that the increasing number of canoeing tourists could damage the unique habitats. Therefore, it was the aim of the association to design a regional development plan, in which the needs of nature and local tourism can be combined. Since then there have been 40 landing points for canoes installed on 160 kilometers on the riverside of the Lahn, which are free to be used by everyone.

From the beginning the nature conservation groups and authorities were involved in the planning process which emerged as a major factor for success. Their expertise helped identify sensitive areas to designate them as 'No-Go' areas for tourists. Furthermore, Girsig focused on communication and education. First, the Lahn Valley Tourism Association created a signage system for canoe landing points and resting places. In addition, they developed an information system that informs tourists about the appropriate behaviour within nature for example on interpretation boards. "We were quite surprised, how well it worked" says Girsig, "Wild campers are no problem anymore at all. You just have to give the guests opportunities to behave eco-friendly and they just do it." He went one step further saying that "many guests even demand that high environmental standard exist."

Furthermore, there are now mobile toilets at the landing points and resting areas, which are funded by the "association of canoe tour operators" and regional cities and communities, as a convenience to the canoeists. The association mainly used old infrastructure for the landing points and resting areas to minimize disturbance. These are always close to buildings and often near train stations, which makes it easy for guests to continue their travel ecologically friendly via public transport. The association also supports the merchandising of local products. Also, they could now partner with numerous companies from the food service industry. This enables conservation, promotion of local products and tourism to walk hand in hand. Needless to say, the suppliers need to adhere to strict sustainability criteria.

The infrastructure for hikers, bikers and canoe tourists as well as for urban and cultural tourism is frequently improved. By now the number of water tourists is stabilized at a level of 140.000 per year. In this way, the diverse nature of the Lahn's meadows can be appreciated and protected by the tourists.

The concept is working.

Ecosystems:

Rivers and floodplains

Ecosystem services:

Habitats:	for animal and plant species
Cultural service:	recreation
Cultural service:	tourism
Cultural service:	aesthetic pleasure

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„Natural Capital Germany – TEEB DE“ is the national follow-up project to the international TEEB initiative (The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity). It was commissioned by the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN) with funding from the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety (BMUB) in order to analyze the manifold values of nature and of the so called ecosystem services in Germany as well as the consequences of species loss also in economic terms and to make them visible. The project is coordinated at the Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research (UFZ) within the period 2012-2015. More information can be found at: www.naturkapital-teeb.de
